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SUBJECT: GERMAN FM STEINMEIER REINFORCES RUSSIAN-GERMAN  
TIES IN WEEK-LONG TRIP

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier's week-long visit to Russia May 12-16, which will be followed by Medvedev's first trip to Europe as President, to Berlin on June 5-6, reinforced Germany as Russia's principal European partner. Steinmeier led a large German business and Bundestag delegation in Yekaterinburg where he also met with FM Lavrov and Sverdlovsk Governor Rossel; met with Medvedev and First Deputy Premier Shuvalov in Moscow, and with Mayor Matvienko in St. Petersburg. Steinmeier also saw opposition leaders in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and previewed what the Germans called a "Partnership for Modernization" at Ural State University. An agreement to meet with PM Putin was rolled back, citing a new policy that Putin would not meet with Foreign Ministers. Lavrov made familiar arguments against a NATO Membership Action Plan for Georgia and Ukraine, U.S. missile defense plans, and EU policies towards Serbia. He agreed in principle to Steinmeier's suggestion that the next Friends of Georgia meeting take place in Berlin, possibly on June 12 or 13. With Medvedev, there was little of foreign policy substance. End summary.

#### Visit Dynamics

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12. (C) FM Steinmeier's unprecedented one-week, 90-person delegation visit to Russia began with a May 12-14 stop in Yekaterinburg, was followed by a 24-hour stopover in Moscow May 14-15, and culminated with consultations in St. Petersburg May 15-16, which will be the site of the October Intergovernmental Commission meeting chaired by Medvedev. German Embassy officials noted that Steinmeier sought to be responsive to Medvedev's call to develop a better understanding of Russia's regions, with Yekaterinburg recently having established a sister city relationship with Munich.

13. (C) German Embassy colleagues noted that Russian officials were mindful of the Steinmeier-Merkel political dynamic and took care not to allow the visit to overshadow or upstage Medvedev's upcoming June 5-6 visit to Germany and meeting with the Chancellor. Despite having promised a Putin meeting (which Berlin announced in advance of the visit), the offer was retracted, with the explanation that "a new agreement had been reached" between Putin and Medvedev, according to which the Prime Minister would not meet with visiting foreign ministers. (The same rule, we were told, was applied to FM Kouchner's May 20-21 visit to Moscow; whether this will apply when Putin visits France on May 29 remains to be seen.) German Embassy officials judged the visit a public relations success, with Steinmeier the first foreign visitor seen by the newly inaugurated Medvedev, but conceded that there was little substance to the sessions.

Medvedev: German Politics, Not Foreign Policy

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14. (C) There was little substantive discussion of foreign policy during Steinmeier's May 14 meeting at the Kremlin with Medvedev. Medvedev remained focused on internal German political dynamics, which German diplomats tell us the Russian government carefully tracks. German diplomats stressed that Steinmeier and Medvedev know each other well, dating back to their Head of Chancellery and Presidential Administration days. Steinmeier made the "Partnership for Modernization" pitch, and suggested Medvedev deliver a foreign policy address in Germany. Medvedev was positive about the former, but the MFA quickly rebuffed the latter, saying the new President had revealed his foreign policy platform during the electoral campaign and it was too soon to expect more. In their public comments, Steinmeier noted that more than 12,000 Russians were studying in Germany.

Lavrov: NATO MAP, Georgia, EU PCA, U.S., Poland, Serbia, Iran  
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15. (SBU) During his press conference with Steinmeier May 14, Lavrov stressed the trade and investment relationship between the two countries, arguing that Russia and Germany had a common vision for how international relations should be conducted, and emphasizing that Russia wanted to increase cooperation with the EU and with NATO, "on an equal footing." He noted that the consultations had laid the ground work for the Intergovernmental Commission meeting in the fall. Lavrov noted differences in approach over Kosovo, CFE, missile defense, NATO enlargement, and Georgia-Abkhazia, while highlighting cooperation on Iran, Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. Using the press conference to underscore the

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need for the P5 1 could lay concrete proposals on the table, including for security guarantees and for ensuring Iran "a worthy, equal place in talks on the settlement of all problems in the Near and Middle East," Lavrov regretted that not all of the P5 1 supported that approach. He added that this would require Iran's "parallel, conscientious fulfillment of its (IAEA obligations)."

15. (C) Operating from a partial readout, German diplomats told us there were no breakthroughs during the May 13-14 four-hour restricted dinner and four-hour expanded meeting in Yekaterinburg May 13-14 between the Foreign Ministers, with positions largely restated. Issues specifically raised:

-- NATO MAP: Lavrov told Steinmeier that NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine would cause Russia to reconsider its relationships with NATO. He reiterated Putin's arguments that MAP was "unacceptable for any Russian President," and only in the course of generational change would Cold War-era concerns be resolved over NATO expansion. He accused the West of using NATO to solve problems for which there was no support in the Security Council, which was a mistake. Steinmeier argued that all parties had to overcome their Cold War mentalities, and that it was "unacceptable" to force Georgia and Ukraine to choose between territorial integrity and their own futures.

-- Georgia: Lavrov reviewed Russian complaints over double standards, particularly the failure of the U.S. to condemn Georgian UAVs flights in violation of the Moscow Agreement. Lavrov stressed that Putin warned Saakashvili that there would be no Russian support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia's induction into NATO, and that Georgia should treat this redline with respect. Russia remained open to dialogue with the GOG, but Lavrov flagged concern over Georgian military purchases. Steinmeier proposed the next Friends of Georgia meeting take place in Berlin, tentatively on June 12 or 13, and Lavrov apparently agreed in principle.

-- EU: Steinmeier publicly and privately urged a quick start to EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations. Lavrov was pessimistic, noting that the

"kick-off" had been long and unsuccessful, which bode poorly for the actual negotiations. Lavrov said there was no Russian "fix" to Lithuania's demands over the Druzhba pipeline, but noted that relations with Latvia were on a more even keel after the ratification of the border treaty. Steinmeier urged Russia to consider more German-Russia-Poland economic projects, in order to increase Polish self-confidence that it was not being ganged up on and to facilitate the completion of North Stream. Lavrov also mentioned Serbia and criticized the EU's cultivation of "pro-EU parties" there.

-- Human Rights: Steinmeier publicly and privately called on Russia to strengthen its respect for rule of law and democracy, in addition to meeting with opposition leaders (see below).

-- U.S. Relations: While acknowledging the good Putin-Bush working relationship, Lavrov blamed the U.S. for fanning anti-Russian sentiment in Europe. Listing U.S. efforts to check Russia, Lavrov focused on U.S. opposition to the South Stream pipeline, missile defense, and MAP.

Shuvalov-WTO

16. (C) Steinmeier also met with First Deputy Premier Shuvalov, who used the 45-minute meeting to affirm his role in shepherding WTO. Shuvalov told Steinmeier that Russia would meet its existing commitments, but would reject further demands.

Opposition Meetings

17. (C) Steinmeier held separate meetings with Other Russia's Garry Kasparov and SPS Nikita Belykh and Masha Gaidar. According to German Embassy officials, he took away from the sessions that the opposition remained weak and divided, with no prospect of unification. Opposition leaders conceded that Medvedev's appeal to the new Russian middle class with anti-corruption statements and measures targeted at small- and medium-business was popular, and made refocusing opposition efforts more difficult.

Comment

18. (C) Germany has been first off the blocks to reaffirm

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its special partnership with Russia, with Merkel the first Western leader to meet Medvedev after his election victory, and Steinmeier the first Western foreign minister to call on the newly inaugurated President. The Russians are being as solicitous, with Berlin slated as Medvedev's first European trip. While this long visit appears to have been light on substance, with foreign policy considerations perhaps not the sole reason driving Steinmeier's travel, it was heavy on symbolism and a reminder to us of the importance of securing German support for a united message on key policy differences -- with NATO MAP at the top of the list.

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